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ABSTRACT

This document is a compendium of information from 34 colleges and universities on freshman seminar/student success courses and their outcomes and how institutions are evaluating and reporting on these programs. Freshman seminars or success courses are courses for entering students that aim to ease the student's transition to the college environment and to increase the chances that students will be successful. Each entry for each institution includes a one or two paragraph description of the course and a longer description of course outcomes including how outcomes were measured and results of evaluation efforts. A side bar for each entry shows the institution site on an outline of the state where it is located, along with a caption giving the institution type and enrollment, and names, addresses, and telephone numbers of one or more contact persons. The entries are grouped by institution type and size. There are 8 two-year community colleges with enrollments of 750 to 56,000, 7 small colleges with enrollments of 500 to 5,000, 10 mid-sized colleges and universities with enrollments of 5,000 to 12,500, and 6 large universities with enrollments of 12,500 to 25,000. (JB)

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Monograph Series
Number 11

®The Freshman Year Experience

Exploring the Evidence

Reporting Outcomes of Freshman Seminars

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Betsy O. Barefoot
Editor

National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience
University of South Carolina 1993

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Monograph Series
Number 11

®The Freshman Year Experience

Exploring the Evidence

Reporting Outcomes of Freshman Seminars

Betsy O. Barefoot
Editor

National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience
University of South Carolina 1993

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Call for Evidence

This brief compendium of information on freshman seminar/student success courses and their outcomes represents a starting point for us in our attempt to gather and share evaluative data on freshman seminars. We invite you and your colleagues to contribute to this growing body of evidence by sending us the results of any prior, ongoing, or future evaluations of these courses on your campus. We will, in turn, share this information with other freshman educators and researchers through an expanded "Volume II" of this report.

Send a brief description of your course, method of evaluation, and outcomes to the National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience, University of South Carolina, 1728 College Street, Columbia, SC 29208, attn.: Dr. Betsy Barefoot. For more information, call (803) 777-6029.

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Introduction

David B. Ellis

Student success courses/freshman seminars, when effectively presented, can dramatically improve student performance and persistence. This is something I have known since the late 1970s when I first coordinated such a course at a small Midwestern college. At that time, there was little real evidence, but lots of enthusiasm about the effects of a freshman seminar on students' experiences in higher education. When I first got involved in teaching a freshman seminar, I was so enthused about the results that I authored a textbook, began a consulting company, and started to assist educators throughout the United States and Canada in establishing similar courses. At that time, the "fact" that such courses were effective was substantiated with little or no formal research, but was supported mostly by the testimony of dozens of teachers who saw students' behavior change significantly as they participated in freshman seminars.

It is now much easier to convince educators of the viability of student success courses because there is research to back up the anecdotal data and the teachers' personal experiences. Much of the data that substantiates the effectiveness of freshman seminar courses is now being widely disseminated. I thank the University of South Carolina and the work of Betsy Barefoot under the direction of John Gardner, and others responsible for this publication.

There is certainly more research to be done to demonstrate the ways in which students benefit from freshman seminars. Much of that research is underway and will be reported in future publications. Even a decade ago, there were several studies demonstrating that student success courses improved retention. More current research shows that not only do retention rates improve, but other measures of effectiveness are also linked to these student success courses. Graduation rates increase, grades improve, students' internal locus of control increases, participation in extracurricular activities and use of school services both increase, and students begin to clarify their short- and long-term goals.

The courses described in this publication are very different in many ways, but they have a common purpose. More than anything else, it is that common purpose, along with a committed instructor, that makes possible such a dramatic difference in the success of first-term college students. Gathering students together at least once a week for several weeks with the purpose of promoting their success in school is the key to the success of freshman seminars. This forum gives students permission to begin seriously inquiring into what they can do to make their academic experience more successful. The format of the classes may change; the books and other materials used in these classes may vary; but what does

not change is the conversation in the classes about what students can do to help themselves reach their academic goals.

Over the last 13 years, the consultants at College Survival and I have worked with thousands of educators in establishing, expanding, or improving student success courses. One of the keys to the effectiveness of such courses has been a commitment to follow basic assessment procedures, including pre-establishing course objectives and outcomes, and then measuring progress toward those outcomes. This commitment to feedback and assessment has allowed courses to improve and has provided evidence necessary for other courses to get started. It is that commitment to rigorous evaluation, as reflected in this publication, which I applaud.

My work with students, teachers, and administrators involved with student success courses has been more rewarding than I ever imagined work could be. Watching students become more self-responsible, more focused, and more committed to contributing to their world at large has been a great gift. I thank all of the people I have met through my association with this work for the commitment and joy they bring to higher education. The programs that are reviewed in this publication represent a small sampling of the creative and competent freshman seminar work being done throughout the United States and Canada.

Introduction

John N. Gardner

When I began over 20 years ago to facilitate this national movement to focus the higher education community's attention to the needs of first-year students, virtually no literature base was available to support this cause, and since its beginnings in 1986, one of the principle missions of our National Resource Center has been to provide such a literature base. This latest Center publication focuses on an increasingly common element of academic life—assessment, in this case assessment of the freshman seminar.

When the American Association for Higher Education hosted the first conference on assessment here at the University of South Carolina in 1985, few of us had any idea that the meeting would set in motion a national movement to focus on accountability. But that, in fact, has happened, and assessment has become a powerful engine which has generated improvements both in teaching and in student learning and satisfaction.

Here at the University of South Carolina, assessment of the effectiveness of the freshman seminar, University 101, has been one key to its success and clearly has been essential to its institutionalization. University 101 was conceived by a dynamic but controversial president in 1972 with the support of the majority of the faculty as represented in the faculty senate. However, two years later this president resigned, and he was succeeded by a new chief executive who wanted to make evaluation of his predecessor's most controversial contributions a hallmark of the new administration. University 101 was one of these controversial contributions targeted for assessment.

To conduct the evaluation procedure, the University turned to an individual with a reputation for integrity, knowledge of student development theory, and experience in assessment. This individual was Paul P. Fidler, currently Director of Grants, Research, and Planning for the Division of Student Affairs. In 1974, Dr. Fidler conducted the first of an annual series of studies to measure the effectiveness of University 101. The results of his 19 years of research are summarized in this publication and reviewed more completely in Volume 3, Number 1 of the Journal of The Freshman Year Experience. It was his work that persuaded the University faculty and administration that University 101 was indeed meeting its goals and, therefore, should be institutionalized and continued.

Since the National Resource Center was established in 1986, we have been contacted frequently by our colleagues at other colleges and universities for assistance in gathering evidence of the effectiveness of freshman seminars. The story is almost always the same; only the characters' names are different. Such data are generally sought in order to

persuade skeptics, to maintain or increase current levels of funding, or to expand numbers of sections. We are also called upon to provide evidence of seminar effectiveness by institutions that are considering whether to move from a current pilot program to a permanent one or from elective to required course status.

For some time, I had realized the need for a compendium of information from other institutions in addition to our own about freshman seminar outcomes, but this kind of task is both expensive and labor intensive. My realization of the need for such a publication was shared by one of my special partners in the freshman seminar movement, David B. Ellis, the author of *Becoming a Master Student* and the founder of College Survival. Dave offered to underwrite a study by our Center to collect whatever evidence we could find and to report whatever we found, whether or not it was favorable to a particular freshman seminar course. Neither Dave nor I would have had it any other way. As this work was in progress, Dave sold the publishing assets of College Survival to Houghton Mifflin Company which, in turn, has maintained his prior commitment to support this study. On behalf of our Center, I sincerely appreciate these corporate acts of philanthropic support.

This monograph would not have been possible without the work of Dr. Betsy Barefoot and her able staff at the National Resource Center. Betsy has co-authored with Dr. Paul Fidler another Center publication which reviews current national data on the freshman seminar. I also want to express my appreciation for the willingness of the institutional researchers and practitioners whose programs are summarized herein to share the results of their research. The results reported in this monograph encourage me to want to take a number of future steps to undertake an even more ambitious national "call for evidence of effectiveness" of freshman seminar outcomes. I am also encouraged to continue to seek additional corporate support for the research and data collection efforts of our National Resource Center.

We welcome your feedback on this and all our publications. We would like to hear how this publication is being used to enhance the development, refinement, and institutionalization of freshman seminars so as to enhance student learning, satisfaction, retention, and graduation.

Foreword

Currently, on approximately two-thirds of the nation's colleges and university campuses, freshman seminar/student success courses are being implemented in an attempt to ease the transition of students into the college environment and to increase the likelihood that admitted students will achieve "success," as it is defined by each institution and each student.

While assessment has become a universal fact of academic life, the process plays a special role with respect to freshman seminars. Because freshman seminars represent a non-traditional curriculum reform, they encounter frequent resistance from the gatekeepers of the formal curriculum and must therefore prove themselves in order to survive. Freshman seminars (and their participating students) have been studied, measured, and evaluated more often than has been the practice for any other course in the higher education curriculum. And on many campuses, freshman seminars have garnered strong support not only because they meet the needs of entering students, but also because they bring clear yields in terms of dollars and "sense"—that is, freshman seminars predictably increase rates of freshman-to-sophomore retention and grade point averages for participating students.

This publication is the first gathering-in of information on outcomes of freshman seminars/student success courses. These summaries were developed from source documents shared by the institutions. While assembling this "evidence of effectiveness," I was struck by something I knew all along—research is hard, especially research on an intervention designed to affect human behavior. The freshman seminar/student success course is just such an intervention. But in spite of inherent difficulties in research and the virtual impossibility of achieving a true experimental design, institutional researchers and practitioners with little or no research background continue to scrutinize the freshman seminar and to report significant positive outcomes.

As you will note, a few researchers have studied the freshman seminar over many years; most, however, have only had the resources or staff to observe and record outcomes for a short period of time. You will also note that the most common measures of evaluation are retention and the grade point average of participants, but a number of campuses have looked at other fascinating outcomes such as

—the effect of teaching a freshman seminar on a faculty member's teaching style in regular discipline-based courses (Central Missouri State),

—the impact of a freshman seminar on student self-perceptions as learners (Elmhurst College),

—the effect of a freshman seminar on the behaviors of undecided students (University of Maine),

—the impact that class size has on the effectiveness of the seminar itself (North Dakota State University),

—the differential impact of different types of seminars (Oregon State University),

—the impact of a freshman seminar content unit concerning sexual responsibility and sexually transmitted diseases on self-reported student behavior (University of South Carolina)

By selecting the research to be highlighted in this compendium, I do not intend to imply that these 34 colleges and universities are the only institutions evaluating freshman seminar outcomes or that, necessarily, their research efforts are the most valid or systematic. I hope that you, the readers of this publication will assist us in identifying other institutions where such research is ongoing so that we may prepare a larger "Volume II" of this report. By reviewing all the seminars for which improved retention is the primary yardstick, I also do not intend to imply that retention should be a front-line objective of freshman seminar/student success courses. At the National Resource Center, it has always been and continues to be our belief that institutions should define first-year student success holistically and should then develop programs and activities to increase the likelihood that students will succeed in all dimensions of college life. Programs designed with a primary focus on student needs will inevitably result in a host of positive outcomes—including, but not limited to, higher rates of student retention.

If you desire more information about any of these programs and related research, you may call or write the contact person or persons listed for each institution. Thank you for your interest in this publication.

Betsy Barefoot, Ed. D.
Co-Director for Research and Publications

TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

750-56,000
Student enrollment

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Chabot College

Chabot College
Hayward, California

Chabot College is a public two-year institution that enrolls about 15,500 students who come primarily from the surrounding communities.

The Course

The freshman seminar course at Chabot is an elective, two quarter hour course and was graded "credit/no credit" until autumn of 1993. At that time, the grading was changed to a letter grade with the option of "credit/no credit" grading. The course, which was offered for the first time in 1987, is taught by counselors and instructors who are trained by the Orientation Program Coordinator. The course was originally designed to improve retention, but improving academic performance and basic college survival skills are now priorities for the freshman seminar course at Chabot.

Course Outcomes

In 1988-89, Chabot's orientation course served 482 freshmen. Those who successfully completed the course showed a higher rate of persistence and better academic performance in the following quarters. Of those freshmen who completed the course successfully, 72.0% persisted to the quarter following the course, and 64.1% persisted through the second quarter. Only 8.1% of students earning a grade of "no credit" persisted through the second quarter. Of the students who completed the course with "credit" or "no credit" grades, 27.8% did not persist through the second quarter. In addition, students' average cumulative GPA at the end of the first quarter after completing the course was 2.36 for those earning grades of "credit" and 1.41 for those earning grades of "no credit." Furthermore, "credit" students enrolled in three more units each quarter, carried a larger total course load, and took a larger number of units that are transferable to four-year institutions than did "no credit" students.

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Champlain College

Champlain College
Burlington, Vermont

Established in 1956, Champlain College is an independent, non-profit, two-year institution with an annual enrollment of approximately 2,000 students.

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The Course

Champlain College's Freshman Focus program is a two-part approach to helping students develop college skills and adult identities. The curriculum of Freshman Focus I puts the question "Who am I?" in five separate contexts to help students form an identity within their college environment: who am I as a learner, who am I in my career aspirations, who am I in the greater community, who am I with my peers, and who am I as a critical thinker.

Freshman Focus II concentrates on utilizing the academic skills taught in the first semester. Freshman Focus II's unique characteristic is that the second-semester students help shape the next Freshman Focus I class by offering their reactions to the first half of the course and by serving as mentors for the next class of incoming students. Student input is a cornerstone of the Freshman Focus program. Both sections of Freshman Focus address the needs of average entering students for instruction in study skills, research, and writing skills. Traditional letter-grading is used.

Course Outcomes

Of those students who successfully completed the first semester of Freshman Focus in Fall 1991, 96% returned in the spring semester. Students who did not attend Freshman Focus persisted into the second semester at a rate of 87%. The average GPA of Freshman Focus students was 2.46 compared to 2.54 for non-Freshman Focus students, but researchers note that Freshman Focus classes include an large number of at-risk students (about 60%). In terms of campus services utilized, the Freshman Focus program is a success. Fifty-four percent of Freshman Focus students used the Student Resource Center compared to 28% of non-Freshman Focus students. Forty-five percent of Freshman

Champlain College . . .

Focus students made use of the Career Planning Center compared with a 16% rate of usage by students who did not attend Freshman Focus.

Genesee Community College

Genesee
Community College
Batavia, New York

Genesee Community College is a two-year public institution that enrolls approximately 4,000 students

The Course

Genesee Community College offers a three credit hour freshman seminar entitled "Transitions: The First-Year Experience." This course is required for developmental students and optional for regularly admitted students. It is designed to help first-year college students cope successfully with both the academic and personal demands of college life and to encourage student use of campus support services. The freshman seminar concentrates on four primary components: study/survival skills; career planning/goal setting; personal development and self-awareness; and the history, current status and purpose of higher education. The course is taught by a mix of faculty and professional advisors and is graded by a traditional letter grade.

Course Outcomes

In an effort to determine the possible effects of the freshman seminar with respect to grade point averages and persistence, researchers compared matched groups of Fall 1989 freshman seminar participants and non-participants. The mean fall grade point average of the students completing the freshman seminar (2.87) was significantly higher than that of the control group of non-participants (2.38). In the spring of 1992, a chi-square analysis was used to measure the effects of both the freshman seminar and remedial identification upon earning a degree or being continually enrolled. Students who were not identified as remedial were significantly more likely to have earned a degree by Spring 1992 or to be still enrolled, if they had completed the freshman seminar. In further discriminant analysis, participation in the freshman seminar in addition to ACT math and English scores accounted for ten percent of the variance in whether a degree was earned.

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Irvine Valley College

Irvine Valley College
Irvine, California

Irvine Valley College is a two-year public institution that enrolls approximately 10,500 students.

The Course

The freshman seminar course at Irvine Valley College is an extended orientation seminar that carries 1.5 credits towards graduation. The course, which has been offered since 1987, is an elective course graded by a letter grade. The course instructors, who are primarily college counselors, are required to attend training sessions prior to teaching a freshman seminar class.

The goals of the course include helping new students to attain their educational goals and improving their academic performance. In the 24 hours of classroom instruction, instructors focus on topics like time management, study skills, academic policies, career exploration, and campus services.

Course Outcomes

This particular study tracked a cohort of Fall 1990 course attendees for three semesters and compared these students with those who did not enroll in the course. Course attendees reported much more focused career and academic goals and at the end of three semesters, persisted in college to a higher degree (59.7% versus 34.5%), and maintained a higher rate of courses passed (77.1% versus 66.4%) than those who did not attend the course. Participating students also reported a much stronger goal focus for academic major and career/vocational aspirations at the end of the orientation course. Twenty percent of the students reported being not sure/undecided about their major at the end of the course as compared to almost 60% at the start of the course. Likewise, only 15% of the students were not sure/undecided about their career/vocational goals at the end of the course as opposed to 50% when the course commenced. This study at Irvine Valley College also revealed that

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Irvine Valley College . . .

students who were performing poorly in the orientation course were performing poorly in other courses as well. As a result of this finding, counselors teaching the course have been advised to take a student's lack of interest in their classes as a likely indicator of the student's poor performance in other discipline-based courses.

Marymount College

Marymount College
Rancho Palos Verdes, California

Marymount is a two-year, Catholic college located south of Los Angeles enrolling approximately 750 students.

The Course

The freshman seminar has been offered since 1983 and is a two-credit, full-semester course required of all freshmen. Students receive a letter grade, and course content focuses on five developmental areas: cognitive, personal, affective, social, and vocational. The Marymount seminar is taught by volunteer faculty in sections of approximately 20 students. Sophomores have been incorporated into the seminar as teaching assistants and are selected on the basis of faculty recommendations, overall academic performance, and level of involvement they displayed as students in the freshman seminar. In 1990, the freshman seminar was extended to include a four-day, pre-semester freshman orientation program. Participation in the orientation program is required as an initial component of the freshman seminar.

Course Outcomes

Since the course is required for all students, no comparison of its outcomes with respect to retention and grade point average is possible. Instead, assessment has been based on student perceptions of the quality and usefulness of the course. In Fall 1989, over 300 freshmen responded to a questionnaire which assessed their perceptions of the course in terms of Likert-scale ratings and written comments. Results of the ratings revealed that 62% rated the seminar as excellent or good; 37% rated it as fair or poor. 70% agreed or strongly agreed that the information in the course would be valuable in future years at college; 10% disagreed with that statement. Sixty-two percent agreed or strongly agreed that the course should be offered every year to first-semester freshmen.

The content of 807 students' written comments was analyzed by an outside evaluator. These comments were

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sorted into three categories according to their evaluative nature: positive, negative, or neutral. Results of this content analysis revealed that positive evaluative comments outnumbered negative comments by a ratio of over 2:1. Students' written comments were also analyzed with respect to the specific aspect or component of the course that was being addressed by the student's comment (e.g., particular course topic or instructional procedure). Recurrent themes within the comments were grouped into separate response categories. Results of this content analysis revealed eight recurrent themes or response categories. Rank-ordered in terms of their frequency, they were:

1. Course eased my transition from high school and enhanced my college adjustment.
2. Information and skills learned were very relevant and could be applied immediately.
3. Enhanced my self-awareness and self-insight.
4. Provided a forum for open and honest discussion of the college experience in general, and the Marymount experience in particular.
5. Promoted my social adjustment and developed my interpersonal skills.
6. Promoted my learning skills and academic success.
7. Course seemed remedial.
8. Course should not be mandatory requirement for all students.

Key quotes in all eight categories were selected to provide readers of the assessment report the full flavor of students' perceptions to complement the quantitative ratings.

Miami-Dade Community College

Miami-Dade Community College
Miami, Florida

Miami-Dade is a multi-campus, public two-year college enrolling approximately 56,000 students.

The Course

Since the winter term of 1984, Miami-Dade's North Campus has offered a one-credit orientation course (SLS 1101) for new students to provide them information and skills essential for college survival. This course carries one hour of academic credit and is required for all first-time college students. Each participant's personal learning goals are individualized based on an initial needs assessment. The course then addresses these goals and also provides students with a variety of campus-based information. Faculty who teach the course are selected for their skill as mentors and are provided additional training to refine mentoring skills and to understand the goals and components of the course.

Course Outcomes

Researchers at Miami-Dade assessed the initial effectiveness of the orientation course in reducing attrition and increasing grade point averages for participating students. This analysis was limited to students enrolling for the first time in the fall term of 1985 and who reported that they planned to pursue either an Associate of Arts or an Associate of Science degree. This group (2,008 students) was followed through the end of the Fall 1986 term, producing results covering three major terms as well as the summer. Of the 2,008 students, 1,145 (57%) enrolled in the course and 863 (43%) did not.

Results indicated that students who enrolled in SLS 1101 were more likely to persist and earn acceptable grade point averages. Findings after one year indicated that 67% of participating students were retained, compared to 46% of non-participants. Grade point averages again favored the SLS 1101 participants, but the differences faded somewhat after one year.

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Sacramento City College

Sacramento City College
Sacramento, California

Sacramento City College is a two-year public institution that enrolls approximately 17,000 students.

The Course

Since the early 1980s, over 9,000 students at Sacramento City College have enrolled in a student success course called College Success. This three semester hour elective course is taught over a period of 18 weeks. In the 54 hours of instruction, four main topic areas are addressed: study skills, life skills, introduction to career planning, and orientation to college. This course is taught as a baccalaureate-level course open to all students.

College Success has multiple goals. They include encouraging students to develop independent learning skills, to seek academic support as needed, to clarify and define educational goals, and to learn more about college rules so as to make fewer mistakes in developing and executing their educational plan. In addition, students learn and put into practice active learning techniques and receive academic coaching from their peers and instructors throughout the semester.

Course Outcomes

Findings of a quasi-experimental longitudinal study completed in 1992 indicated that enrollment in the College Success course had a significant impact on the academic performance and persistence of first-year students. College Success participants completed 326% as many units as the matched control group, and, in the academic skills areas, freshman College Success students earned a C or better in four times as many math classes, three times as many writing courses, and twice as many reading courses. In addition, only half as many of the students enrolled in the course dropped out the first semester, never to return during the seven semesters of the study.

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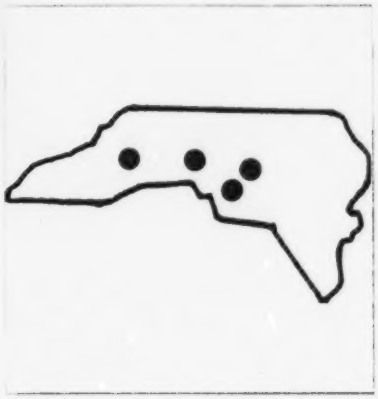
Sacramento City College . . .

These results may be of particular interest and importance to colleges with open-door admissions policies that are seeking to improve the academic performance of their students while reducing their drop-out rate.

Four North Carolina Community Colleges



The Course

A common one-credit orientation course was offered in the fall of 1990 to new first-time, full-time, daytime, degree-seeking enrollees at these four campuses. The course met one hour per week for 11 weeks and was designed to help participating students analyze their own strengths and weaknesses as learners, develop essential academic skills, learn about the resources of the campus, and acquire information about such topics as financial planning, self-esteem, and wellness/stress management. The course was taught by volunteer faculty, administrators, and college staff who participated in five to ten hours of instructor training. Instructors were encouraged to incorporate a maximum of active learning strategies such as group activities, self-exploration quizzes, writing assignments, and oral reports.

Course Outcomes

These institutions were participants in a single study to determine the effect of such a course on student retention and GPA. At the time of the study, all four colleges were in the process of developing and implementing an orientation-course.

A total of 86 students from all institutions who successfully completed the orientation course were selected and matched with 86 students who had not enrolled in the course. A perfect match was required for sex, race, and college attended. A close match was used for age, college major, college entrance test scores, and employment status. Subjects were predominately Caucasian (84%), female (54%), under 20 years of age (75%), and employed in part-time jobs (75%). Data comparing retention (measured by credit hours earned) and GPAs of participants and non-participants were collected after one full year and were analyzed with analysis of variance (ANOVA) performed on

Catawba Valley Community College, Hickory, North Carolina
Approximately 3,500 students.

Central Carolina Community College Sanford, North Carolina
Approximately 3,000 students.

Randolph Community College Asheboro, North Carolina
Approximately 1,500 students.

Sandhills Community College Pinehurst, North Carolina
Approximately 2,500 students.

These institutions are located in central North Carolina. Each institution volunteered for inclusion in the subject study.

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Four NC Community Colleges . . .

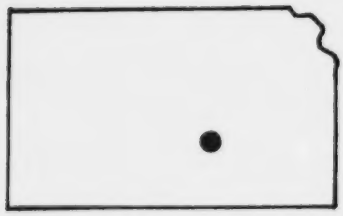
differences in mean scores of cumulative GPAs and total credit hours earned.

Students who participated in the orientation course had significant higher GPAs than the matched group of non-participants. The difference in mean GPAs between those completing the orientation course and those not enrolling in the course was .34. Secondly, participants earned, on average, nine more credit hours during the first college year than non-participants. Students' age, sex, race, employment status, college major, and college attended were not related to either credits earned or to college GPA.

SMALL COLLEGES

500-5,000
Student population

Bethel College



Bethel College
North Newton, Kansas

Bethel College is a private, liberal arts college enrolling approximately 560 students. The institution is affiliated with the Mennonite Church.

Contact:

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The Course/Program

Bethel's freshman seminar course is at the heart of a comprehensive freshman year experience program. The seminar is required for all students, is letter-graded, and carries two semester hours of academic credit. It is taught by faculty who are involved in ongoing faculty development activities. For the past three years, the theme for the seminar has been "Issues in Diversity." The seminar combines both academic and extended orientation content.

Other components of the freshman year program at Bethel include strong academic and personal advising, an early warning system to target first-year students in academic difficulty, and a "home away from home" program that matches out-of-state students with families and alumni in the area who are willing to provide an occasional home-cooked meal or a place to stay during holidays.

Course /Program Outcomes

Prior to the initiation of the freshman year program at Bethel, the college was losing 38 - 40% of the freshmen by their sophomore year. That attrition rate has been reduced to 27%. In addition to improvement in retention rates, students' attitudes have become more positive. Before the program was implemented, ACT Student Opinion Surveys indicated that Bethel College rated below the mean of colleges of the same type on everything except appearance of the campus, housing, and student security. Every year since the initiation of the seminar course, Bethel College has improved on the Student Opinion Survey. In 1992, the college scored significantly above the mean on items including availability of advisors, student policies, racial harmony, and concern for students as individuals. A qualitative study of students who left and those who were contem-

Bethel College . . .

plating leaving resulted in an increased understanding of what aspects of campus culture significantly influenced a student's decision to stay or to leave.

Bloomfield College

Bloomfield College
Bloomfield, New Jersey

Bloomfield College is a private, liberal arts institution affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. Bloomfield enrolls approximately 2,000 students.

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The Course

Bloomfield College's introductory seminars, IDS 161 and 162 - Human Development and Communication Workshops, comprise a two-semester sequence. Each course carries two hours of elective credit. IDS 161 is mandatory for all students needing foundation work and is optional for other new students. IDS 162 is an optional course for all students. These are experiential, competency-based seminars designed to acquaint freshmen with themselves as learners and with higher education. Overall, seminar goals are to improve writing skills, oral communications, and research skills, and to facilitate personal development and ultimate success at Bloomfield. The topic for IDS 161 is "Autobiography and Self Portrait." Students examine themselves, their development, history, and relationship to society. IDS 162 encourages students to take a critical look at society and higher education through philosophical and critical writings on utopian ideals. Classes meets once a week, but carry with them a workshop component which develops practical skills in research, reading, and writing. Traditional letter-grading is used to evaluate papers and a final library research project, which counts for half the total course grade. Section size is limited to 16 students. These courses are taught by faculty, student affairs professionals, and campus administrators who are required to participate in an instructor training workshop. At-risk students are also required to take an additional one-credit hour seminar as part of the institution's Enhanced Counseling Program (ECP). The ECP Program also includes one-on-one academic advising and career planning for participating students.

Course Outcomes

Students who participate only in IDS 161 are generally retained at a higher rate than non-participants with respect

Bloomfield College . . .

to fall to spring and fall to fall retention. For the past three years, 80% of participants and 75% of non-participants have been retained fall to spring, and 75% of participants compared to 70% of non-participants have been retained fall to fall. Students who also participate in the ECP Program are retained at an even higher rate--on average over the past three years, 88% of students who attended IDS 161 and participated in the Enhanced Counseling Program at Bloomfield have been retained from fall to spring and 80% from fall to fall.

Elmhurst College

Elmhurst College
Elmhurst, Illinois

Elmhurst College is a private, four-year institution enrolling approximately 3,000 students.

The Course

In its effort to increased the academic success and retention of at-risk students, (those who scored below 18 on the ACT or ranked in the lower half of their high school class), Elmhurst, in 1986, initiated a voluntary, non-credit seminar on study skills, the college system, and personal development. A comparison of 1986 participants and non-participants showed that participants were more academically successful. Based on those findings, the college approved a credit-bearing college study and orientation seminar for admitted at-risk students. The course has evolved based upon analysis of student performance, and currently, course objectives are to help students understand their own strengths and weaknesses as learners and to focus on learning strategies (study skills), time management, and social relationships affecting academic performance. Students generate and carry out action plans to solve their "personally sensed" problems in one of these areas or to strengthen performance in each area.

Course Outcomes

Student perceptions of themselves as learners were measured before and after the course using the Learning and Study Skills Inventory (LASSI). As an additional measure of student self-awareness, course designers asked students to complete a Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) at the end of the course. Students were asked to express, on this visual scale, their sense of themselves with respect to nine dimensions of academic success comparing how they felt before the course to how they were feeling at the completion of the course. Results of the LASSI and VAS were analyzed for students in both good (74%) and poor (26%) academic standing at the end of the fall semester of 1990. Overall VAS results were more highly correlated with first-term GPA than LASSI results, although LASSI was somewhat more sensitive with students in poor academic standing.

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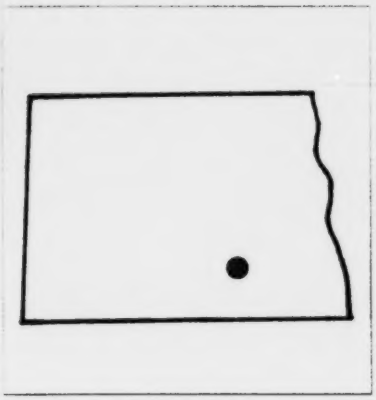
Elmhurst College . . .

To study further the factors that correlate with academic success, students were grouped according to end-of-term academic performance, and pre/post VAS results were compared for students earning below a 2.0 and students earning a 2.0 or better. For students in good academic standing at course completion, seven of the nine course goals had been realized as indicated by VAS results. These goals were (1) increased confidence in abilities, (2) improved time management skills, (3) enhanced ability to handle academics, (4) increased willingness to take a variety of courses, (5) improved study skills, (6) heightened awareness of behaviors that hinder academic success, and (7) greater determination to succeed.

Students who were not in good academic standing at the completion of course realized only two course goals as measured by VAS. These were (1) an awareness of behaviors that hinder academic success, and (2) improved study skills. Elmhurst researchers encourage the use of the Visual Analog Scale as a supplement to LASSI and as a means to conceptualize course goals, to measure student self-perception of goal achievement, and to see whether student self-perceptions correspond with actual academic performance.

Jamestown College



Jamestown College
Jamestown, North Dakota

Jamestown College is a church related (Presbyterian) liberal arts college enrolling just over 1,000 students.

The Course

With support of a grant from the Bush Foundation, College 101 was offered for the first time in the fall of 1991. Currently all freshmen are required to take this letter-graded course which carries one semester hour of elective credit toward graduation.

The objectives of College 101 are to orient students to college life, to improve study skills, and to encourage faculty mentoring of first-year students. Faculty members teach all sections, and section size is limited to ten students.

Course Outcomes

After College 101 was implemented, the percentage of freshmen who withdrew from Jamestown was nearly cut in half (15.1% attrition in 1988-89; 8.6% in 1990-91). First semester grade point averages of freshmen rose slightly in the same time span—from 2.62 to 2.65.

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Marietta College

Marietta College
Marietta, Ohio

Marietta College is a private coeducational college with a primarily residential student body of 1,300.

The Course

Marietta College has been offering special freshman seminars since 1980, and beginning in 1991-92 the College Experience Seminar became part of the general education requirements for all entering students. The seminar is a three-credit hour, graded course taught by specially trained faculty and staff who become the students' academic advisors for at least the first college year. The 20 students in each seminar share a residence hall, and the upper-class resident assistant is also the student mentor for the seminar. Special residence hall programming is linked to the course in the following manner: all seminar students must attend the sessions in the residence hall on alcohol and drug abuse and sexual assault. Then they may choose programs from a list of at least ten additional programs during the first semester. The seminar itself has the following goals: enhancement of communication skills through extensive reading and both formal and informal writing, values clarification, group building, introduction to higher education, and introduction to the culture of the Marietta College community.

Course Outcomes

Since 1991, the freshman year has been assessed and evaluated. Students attending the special summer orientation complete a questionnaire which attempts to gauge students' attitudes towards higher education in general, as well as attitudes towards certain social values. The same questionnaire with some modifications is given at the end of the semester in order to assess differences in attitudes. The intent is to give a modified questionnaire to the students throughout their years of matriculation at Marietta College to help determine what changes occur in attitudes as a result of the undergraduate experience.

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Marietta College . . .

In addition, the College Experience Seminar is evaluated in such a manner that attempts not only to assess success in carrying out the announced goals of the seminar but also to make important comparisons with other courses that are part of the students' general education requirement. Analysis of the results enables the coordinators of the seminar to make needed changes in syllabus, changes in emphasis, and perhaps changes in instructors. A final aspect of the freshman year program involves a close analysis of other facets of the freshman year experience. For example, Marietta College has begun to track those students who are honor students, those who were part of the special Summer Provisional Program, those who were interviewed by members of the coaching staff, those who were accepted late in the summer, those who were among the last to pay their deposits, etc.

Certain important results are already apparent from Marietta's two year effort at assessment and evaluation. The data reveal that perhaps the sexual abuse programs and general deliberations on gender issues have begun to alter some attitudes positively. At least 75% of the first-year students at Marietta place a higher value on the College Experience Seminar than any other course in the core curriculum, and 74% believe that the College Experience Seminar was the same as, superior to, or good with respect to the quality of the instruction for the other core courses.

Ramapo College of New Jersey

Ramapo College of New Jersey
Mahwah, New Jersey

Ramapo College is a four-year, public, liberal arts college with an enrollment of approximately 4,000 students. The student population is ethnically diverse and evenly distributed between in- and out-of-state students as well as residential and commuting students.

The Course

Since 1986, Ramapo has offered a three-semester hour, letter-graded College Seminar. This seminar includes units on higher education in America, writing, research, note-taking, and computer skills, time management, interpersonal relations, substance abuse, stress management, values clarification, volunteerism, diversity issues, and career planning. College Seminar is now required for all entering students.

Course Outcomes

In 1986, approximately half of the entering freshmen enrolled in College Seminar. Freshman-to-sophomore retention rates greatly favored those students who enrolled in the seminar. This advantage held true for this cohort through graduation. After 1987, College Seminar became a required course for all first-year students. Retention rates for entering students from 1987 to the present are significantly higher than the rates for freshmen entering in years before the seminar was offered. Students enrolled in College Seminar also performed significantly better in their studies measured by cumulative grade point average after four semesters.

Results of surveys distributed to freshmen since 1986 may explain the differential persistence rates. Students who participated in College Seminar were more involved in all aspects of campus life, had a greater comfort level and more out-of-class interaction with faculty, and were more familiar with college support services. Data analyzed by the American College Testing Program revealed that freshmen at Ramapo acquired significantly more positive attitudes towards faculty and advisors than freshmen at other public colleges.

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Marshall Harth
Convener of College Seminar Program
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University of Prince Edward Island

University of Prince Edward Island Charlottetown, PEI, Canada

The University of Prince Edward Island is a public institution founded in 1969 enrolling approximate 2,600 full-time and 900 part-time students.

The Course

University 100 is a six semester hour (two-semester) course designed to give first-year students an introduction to the University and to University studies. Specific goals of the course are to develop effective academic skills, to assist in the development of self-knowledge, and to promote an awareness of the structures, programs, and services of the University. University 100 is a graded elective course taught by University faculty who participate in a five-day summer teaching workshop.

Course Outcomes

Research comparing the second-year return rates of University 100 participants and non-participants indicates that from 1986 through 1990, an average of 83.5% of participants were retained compared to 60% of non-participants. Four-year graduation rates of participants and non-participants who took University 100 in 1986 were also dramatically different. While the four-year graduation rate for all students at UPEI was 28%, 49% of University 100 completers graduated within the same time period.

In April 1991, a survey instrument was mailed to the 206 students who had completed University 100 since the course began in 1986. The survey response rate was 35%. The responses of University 100 graduates, looking back at the course from the perspective of one to five years, was overwhelmingly positive. Ninety-three percent of those responding said that they would recommend the course to other students; just over 4% were undecided, and 3% would not recommend that others take the course. Students were also asked to rank the various course components in terms of their importance and applicability to undergraduate work. The components of the course seen as most useful

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University of Prince Edward Island . . .

were library research, oral communications skills, knowledge of university support services, debating/critical thinking skills, note taking/listening, and the development of self-confidence.

MID -SIZED COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

5,000-12,500
Student population

Central Missouri State University

Central Missouri State University
Warrensburg, Missouri

Central Missouri State is a comprehensive state university enrolling approximately 12,000 students.

The Course

University 1000, "Student Development Seminar," is a one-semester hour, graded, elective course. Currently, between 50 and 75% of the freshman class enrolls in the seminar. Enrollment for each section is limited to 25 students, and students may choose to take the course over an eight or ten week period. Course objectives for students include the creation of a support group, the development of essential academic and personal competencies, and increased familiarity with the institution and with higher education. In addition, the institution expects the course to result in higher freshman-to-sophomore retention for participants and to promote faculty development and collegiality for instructors.

University 1000 is administered through the institution's Education Development Center and is staffed with volunteers (faculty, staff, administrators, graduate students, and upper-level undergraduates). Most sections are team-taught. Prospective instructors are required to attend an eight-hour training session that emphasizes both course process and content. In addition, faculty collegiality is enhanced through weekly brown bag "working" luncheons for all University 1000 instructors.

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Course Outcomes

For students. Data have been collected and analyzed comparing University 1000 participants and non-participants from 1985 - 1988 with respect to retention, grade point averages, credits completed, and graduation. ACT composite scores and high school grade point average were control variables.

University 1000 participants in the fall of 1985 were retained at a statistically significant higher rate than non-participants

Central Missouri State University . . .

after one, two, and three years and graduated at a statistically significant higher rate at the end of four years. (Note: Half the students at Central Missouri take more than four years to graduate.)

No significant differences were noted with respect to grade point averages and credits completed when grades and credit for University 1000 were excluded.

For faculty. Full-time faculty who had taught University 1000 between 1984 and 1991 were surveyed to determine their attitudes toward teaching the course and whether this teaching experience changed their teaching techniques in regular classes. Of the 81 faculty respondents, 79% indicated that they had learned more about freshmen, 70% responded that they had learned more about the University as a result of teaching the course. Seventy-eight percent of respondents indicated that they used "new or different" techniques in teaching University 1000, 79% tried these techniques in regular classes at least once, and 51% continue to use some of these techniques in regular classes.

Creighton University

Creighton University
Omaha, Nebraska

Creighton is a Jesuit university with an enrollment of just over 6,000 students.

The Course

The MAST (From "Master Student") course at Creighton has been designed for second semester freshmen who achieved under a 2.0 grade point average during their first semester. Students in this category are "strongly encouraged" by their deans to participate in the course. The course carries two semester hours of credit and is graded pass/fail. Course goals are (a) to assist students in developing college-level study and thinking skills, and (b) to provide an opportunity for examination of personal motivation and goals. Course topics include time management, effective reading and note taking, library use, and test taking strategies. Students also explore personal learning styles and career interests.

Course Outcomes

Research on the effectiveness of the MAST program was accomplished by comparing four groups: the Normal group who obtained at least a 2.0 during the first semester; the MAST-Pass group who obtained a GPA below 2.0 but passed the MAST course; the MAST-Fail group who obtained a GPA below 2.0 and who registered for but failed or withdrew from the MAST course; and the Non-Participant group who obtained less than a 2.0 but did not participate in a MAST class. When comparing second semester GPAs, only the MAST-Pass group improved significantly from first to second semester, earning a mean 2.093 GPA. Second semester GPAs for the other three groups were 2.4 (Normal), 1.072 (MAST-Fail), and 1.679 (non-participants). Third semester GPAs were 2.8 for the normal group, 2.3 for the MAST-Pass group, .85 for the MAST-Fail group, and 2.2 for the non-participants.

Findings with respect to retention to the sophomore year indicated that 89% of Normal students, 74% of MAST-Pass

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Creighton University . . .

students, 37% of MAST-fail students, and 36% of non-participants were retained.

Researchers conclude that attending and passing a MAST course is associated with statistically significant better academic performance during the semester the course is offered and higher retention levels to the sophomore year.

Frostburg State University

Frostburg State University
Frostburg, Maryland

Frostburg State University is a four-year public university enrolling approximately 5,000 students.

The Course

The freshman seminar course at Frostburg State is a mandatory course for all first-year students and for transfer students with fewer than 25 semester hours. This one-credit hour course is taught by members of the faculty as well as by staff from Student and Educational Services. Students are not allowed to withdraw from the course unless they withdraw from the university.

Course objectives include promoting the understanding of higher education, promoting the understanding of and active participation in the educational and career planning processes, and encouraging the development of learning skills that will enhance academic success. Course topics include knowledge about campus activities, dealing with freedom, self-appraisal of abilities, selecting a major, cultural diversity, and developing commitments. Although course objectives remained constant over the years studied (1987-1990), each year brought some variation in the course structure. In 1987, instructors followed a common calendar and used the same learning activities in all sections. In 1988, instructors were allowed greater flexibility to address the course objectives. In 1989, a core of five required components was identified, but flexibility was permitted with regard to the timing and choice of specific activities.

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Course Outcomes

For the three years of this study, the course was evaluated in two ways. The first evaluation attempted to measure students' perceptions of the degree to which the course met its objectives. The second was more indirect and long-term and attempted to determine the relationship between measures of academic and social integration and retention.

The 1987 course model (highly structured) yielded the strongest measure of students' abilities to identify and use

Frostburg State University . . .

appropriate campus resources. The 1989 model was more successful than the other two in the attainment of the core objectives. Students expressed a greater ability to relate academic interest to majors and careers, greater knowledge of general education, and a greater understanding of relationship issues in 1989 than in the previous two years.

As an additional measure, students in each cohort were surveyed to determine the level of their academic and social integration into campus life. Survey results indicated that the 1989 cohort expressed greater commitment to completing a college degree and greater commitment to Frostburg State University than previous cohorts.

Kean College of New Jersey

Kean College of New Jersey
Union, New Jersey

Kean College is a comprehensive state institution enrolling around 12,000 students who come primarily from surrounding urban areas.

The Course

The freshman seminar at Kean College is a mandatory one-credit course which is graded pass/fail. The course, which has been offered since 1986, is taught by full-time faculty and members of the professional staff. These instructors are assisted by peer liaisons—specially selected undergraduates who are trained to provide freshmen with useful information and personal support.

The goal of Kean College's freshman seminar is to provide incoming freshmen with an orientation to college life and a support system that helps them cope with the stresses and strains of their daily lives on and off campus. The course seeks to help students handle the academic challenges of college life, to understand college policies, become aware of campus resources, and to learn skills that will support their educational and vocational aspirations. In addition, students are exposed to information and experiences that prepare them to understand and appreciate the challenges and benefits of working in a diverse college community and community at large—including, for example information and experiences designed to foster multicultural awareness and awareness/understanding of racism, sexism, and homophobia. Instructors must participate in a one-day training workshop before teaching. The course instructors serve as both teachers and advisors, and are responsible for students' advanced registration for the following semester.

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Course Outcomes

The freshman seminar at Kean College is but one of a number of components of a comprehensive college-wide retention program. Outcomes therefore must be viewed as comprehensive and not necessarily related to the course alone. Since the implementation of freshman programs, retention rates have improved from 70.9% in 1985-86 to

Kean College of New Jersey . . .

77.1% in 1989-90. These results have been especially dramatic among high-risk admission categories and minority students. Hispanic student retention during this period increased from 58.6% to 78%, and African-American student retention, from 68.1% to 76.4%.

Kennesaw State College

Kennesaw State College
Marietta, Georgia

Kennesaw State is a four-year public institution on the outskirts of Atlanta with an enrollment of approximately 11,000 students, all of whom are commuters.

The Course

KSC 101 is a five quarter hour elective, extended orientation course which teaches basic academic survival skills and acquaints students with campus support services and screens them for deficiencies in written and oral communication. The course is taught by trained faculty who are released from a regular class section during the quarter they teach KSC 101.

Course Outcomes

A longitudinal retention study was undertaken to investigate the relationship between KSC 101 participation and retention. Experimental and control groups of students were selected from the entering freshman classes in fall 1984, 1985, and 1986. The quarter-to-quarter retention and academic success of these students were tracked for six quarters. Only new freshmen with declared majors who completed more than ten credit hours their first quarter were included in the study. Developmental studies students—those requiring verbal and/or quantitative remediation upon admission—were considered as a separate "high risk" category for certain comparisons.

For regularly admitted students (mean SAT of 944), no significant difference was found in freshman-to-sophomore retention rates for participants and non-participants in KSC 101. However, the cumulative grade point averages of the seminar students were consistently and significantly higher than those of the controls. Additional research with regular admits, however, found that the freshman seminar course disproportionately enhanced the retention of students with higher SAT scores (over 900). This finding argues against the commonly held belief that freshman seminars are of greatest value to students with academic deficiencies.

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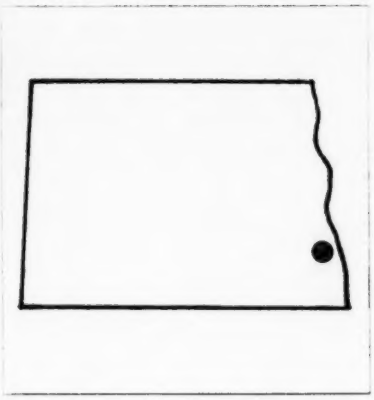
Kennesaw State College . . .

Within the developmental studies category (mean SAT of 713), 18% of the control group, compared to only 2% of seminar participants, failed to complete the first quarter. For all quarters of the observation interval, the mean cumulative GPAs of seminar students were significantly higher than for non-participants.

North Dakota State University



North Dakota State University
Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University is a public, four-year, land-grant institution enrolling approximately 9,000 students.

The Course

With three-year funding from the Bush Foundation, North Dakota State has implemented an elective, one-credit course called "Skills for Academic Success." This course is taught both by faculty and student affairs professionals and has as its goals an increased comfort level of first-year students with the academic experience, development of academic skills, familiarity with campus resources, and exposure to information about health and life-style issues. In the fall of 1992 the class was taught in ten sections of varying size to test the possible effect of class size on course effectiveness. Three sections were classified as small with a successful completion of less than 15 students, four sections were labeled as medium with a successful completion of between 15 and 30 students, and three sections were labeled large with a successful completion of more than 30 and less than 120 students.

Course Outcomes

Students were asked to rate both the course and the instructor in all sections of the course. Bartlett's Test of Proportions was used to test the hypothesis that class size makes no difference or does not influence student attitudes. The hypothesis was significantly rejected for five of the eleven items on the rating sheet. Initial results supported the offering of small classes (15 students). To further analyze the findings, researchers combined the results from small and medium classes and compared these evaluations with those from classes with over 30 students. Fisher's Exact Text was used to examine the data, and once again the hypothesis that class size makes no difference in student attitudes was significantly rejected for five of the eleven items. Researchers conclude that the desired effect from a freshman seminar can be achieved from the more affordable

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North Dakota State University . . .

class of 30 students as well as from the more costly class of 15 students. Researchers observe that results obtained here cannot be generalized to other types of first-year courses.

University of Maine

University of Maine
Orono, Maine

The University of Maine is the public, flagship institution of the state of Maine enrolling approximately 12,300 students.

The Course

Academic and Career Exploration (ACE) 100 is a one-credit, pass-fail seminar offered to students in the ACE Program, the academic home for the University's undecided students. ACE 100 is a two-semester course, and class sections have a maximum enrollment of 20 students. ACE 100 is taught by faculty who also advise students in the ACE Program until they declare a major. During the first semester, undecided students are introduced to University resources and academic programs as well as to strategies for achieving academic success. Activities designed to foster exploration and evaluation of interests, goals, and abilities and their relationship to potential majors and careers are a major component of the first semester. During the second semester, students undertake a more in-depth assessment of their own abilities and aptitudes and acquire more information about the academic disciplines and potential occupations.

Course Outcomes

In contrast to a previous program for undecided students administered through the College of Arts and Sciences, the ACE Program was designed to encourage students to explore and choose majors throughout the institution. Examination of college choice by current ACE students indicates that this has occurred. Previously, over 70% of students selected majors in either arts and humanities or social and behavioral sciences, and no students selected a major in four of the nine colleges. ACE students, in contrast, have selected majors in each of the University's colleges, and no single college has acquired an overwhelming majority of ACE participants.

In addition the program has attracted a number of students who are "major changers." Typically, these students chose

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University of Maine . . .

an inappropriate major upon entry. Special advising and seminar sections have been developed to meet the needs of these students. Student evaluations of the program, the course, and the instructor/advisors are overwhelmingly positive.

University of Southern Indiana

University of Southern Indiana
Evansville, Indiana

The University of Southern Indiana is a four-year public institution established in 1965 with an enrollment of just over 7,000.

The Course

The University of Southern Indiana's freshman seminar course is designed to help students who are admitted conditionally survive in the college environment. The course teaches time-management, note-taking skills, memory skills, reading techniques, test-taking skills, and goal-setting. The freshman seminar also addresses various relationships and problem-solving situations encountered in college life. Although freshman seminar is specifically tailored to meet the needs of conditionally enrolled students, any first-year student in the University Division (undeclared students or conditional admits) may register for the course. Maximum class size is 30 students.

Course Outcomes

Since the fall of 1987, the effect of the freshman seminar course on the retention and good standing of conditionally enrolled students has been studied in depth. In the fall of 1991, 165 out of 322 conditionally enrolled students participated in the freshman seminar. Participants were compared to non-participants with respect to GPA, earned credit hours, and retention. Freshman seminar participants were retained to the spring semester (78%) at significantly higher levels than non-participants (68%). No statistically significant differences in GPA or earned credit hours were noted between participants and non-participants

Outcomes between the years 1989, 1990, and 1991 show that while grade point averages are not always affected by the freshman seminar, more students who take the course are retained, and they generally attempt and earn credits faster than the students who do not enroll in the class. Researchers note, however, that when the course was established, its enrollment was 80% freshmen in good standing and 20%

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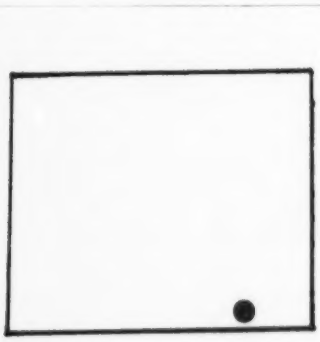
University of Southern Indiana . . .

freshmen conditionally admitted. In recent years, those percentages have reversed, making the freshman seminar an almost exclusively developmental course.

University of Wyoming



University of Wyoming
Laramie, Wyoming

The University of Wyoming is the only four-year institution in the state of Wyoming and has a student population of 12,000. Seventy-five percent of students are from Wyoming.

The Course

Freshman orientation seminars were first offered at the University of Wyoming in Fall 1991 as part of a new core curriculum. A unique feature of the University of Wyoming freshman seminars is the inclusion of sections tailored for students who have declared (or are interested in) a certain major. Instructors for these special sections tailor the generic course to the college or department. All entering students are required to take a freshman seminar. The course carries one semester hour of academic credit which is applied as a core requirement.

The Wyoming freshman seminar has as its guiding theme, "Changes, Challenges and Choices." Students are encouraged to consider personal, academic, institutional, and societal change in the first year of college. Seminars are taught by faculty, academic administrators, and professional staff. All instructors are required to attend approximately 12 hours of instructor training as a prerequisite for teaching the course.

Course Outcomes

The impact of the new orientation seminar upon retention, graduation, and other desired outcomes will be tracked for successive student cohorts. Initial research indicates a two percent improvement in Fall 1991 to Spring 1992 retention over the previous year, an increase in library circulation, use of student services and campus resources. Freshman to sophomore retention rates (Fall 1991 to Fall 1992) also improved about two percentage points over retention rates for Fall 1990 to 1991. University of Wyoming researchers note that as withdrawal rates have decreased, numbers of students on probation have increased slightly.

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University of Wyoming . . .

In addition to research on the objective outcomes of this course, student participants are being systematically surveyed to determine the effects of the course itself upon unique student sub-groups—first generation college students, non-traditional college students, women (and men). Survey results are being used to modify the course as it is offered in succeeding semesters.

Before and after teaching the course, instructors were surveyed about their general attitudes toward teaching freshmen. Survey results indicated that freshman seminar instructors tended to become more student centered in teaching their regular content courses after teaching a freshman seminar. In addition, seminar instructors were noted to rate the academic performance of their seminar students more highly than first-year students in general.

Xavier University

Xavier University
Cincinnati, Ohio

Xavier University is a Jesuit university enrolling between 6,000 and 7,000 students.

The Course

The freshman seminar at Xavier is one component of a comprehensive program designed to improve the success and retention of first-year students. Freshman seminars are taught within academic departments and are designed to focus on improving academic skills--such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking--within discipline-based courses. Students are encouraged to share study strategies and techniques, to connect abstract concepts with real world issues, and to interact freely with faculty and other class members.

These discipline-based seminars, which have been offered since 1990, are elective courses carrying three hours of academic credit. Credit may be applied toward a specific major or elective requirements. Although seminars are offered in 12 areas of the core curriculum, students are permitted to register for only one seminar per semester. Seminar size is limited to 20 students.

Faculty who teach seminars do so as volunteers; they interact regularly and frequently, sharing common problems and ideas for improved teaching.

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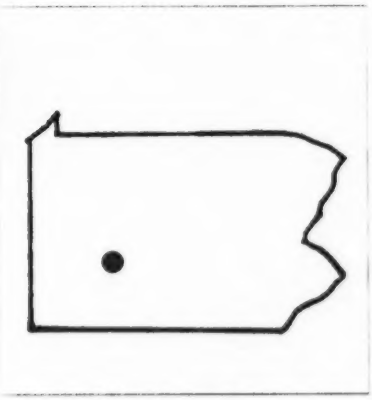
Course Outcomes

Xavier's freshman seminar was designed and implemented in order to improve the institution's overall 1989 freshman-to-sophomore retention rate of 81.7%. Over the two and one half year period that seminars have been offered, retention rates (semester to semester) of seminar participants have increased from 91% in the fall semester of 1990 to 96.6% (230 out of 238 freshmen in 15 seminars) in the fall of 1992. Data are not currently available comparing the retention rates of freshman seminar participants and non-participants.

LARGE UNIVERSITIES

12,500-25,000
Student enrollment

Indiana University of Pennsylvania



Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, Pennsylvania

Indiana University of Pennsylvania is a public, four-year university enrolling approximately 15,000 students.

The Course

In response to the historically low first- and second-year retention rates of students attending Indiana University of Pennsylvania's branch campuses, the Branch Campus Retention Committee recommended that an orientation course be developed for these students. In the fall of 1984, an orientation course entitled "The Student's Role in the University: Freshman Seminar" was offered to 90 high-risk freshmen at two branch campuses. This course included three primary components: learning skills; college, personal, and social adjustment; and career exploration. Each class session combined large-group instruction with small-group applications and discussions. Two faculty members from the division of student affairs taught the course. In addition, three graduate students assisted by facilitating small-group applications and discussions.

Course Outcomes

Retention and grade point averages of seminar students and a matched control group were tracked for three years following the course. Although mean GPAs of the experimental and control groups were equal at the outset, the mean cumulative GPAs of the seminar completers were significantly higher ($p < .01$) at the end of one, two, and three years. Seminar completion was also correlated with increased retention, although the differences between groups did not reach statistical significance. In addition to these objective findings, students evaluated the course favorably. Ninety percent indicated that the course achieved its goals.

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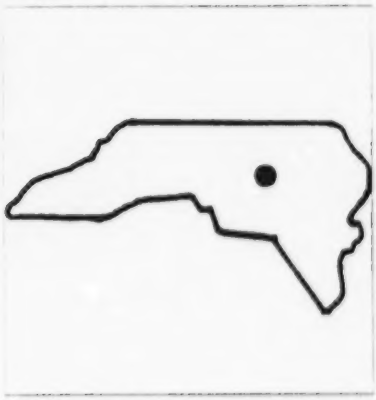
North Carolina State University



North Carolina State University
Raleigh, North Carolina

North Carolina State is a public, land-grant, research university with an enrollment of just over 27,000 students.

The Course

To meet the needs of its diverse student population, North Carolina State has implemented the following special courses for first-year students: a required course for undeclared students, a required course for provisionally admitted students, an elective course for African-American students, and a residential first-year experience course offered as a required component of a comprehensive, residential first-year experience program. This program involves approximately 325 students and includes a mentoring component utilizing both upper-level student and adult mentors, cluster classes which are restricted to First-Year Experience students (some of which are taught in the residence hall), and a one-credit hour seminar offered both semesters of the freshman year. These seminars are taught by faculty and staff with special interest in and concern for freshmen and are designed to help students in the academic and social transition to a large campus.

Course Outcomes

Students participating in the residential first-year experience program have been compared to a matched control group of students with respect to retention and first-year grade point averages. Of the 329 students who began the program in 1990, 271 (82.4%) persisted to the third college year compared to 259 (78.7%) for the control group. Of the 342 students who began the program in 1991, 314 (91.8%) persisted to the sophomore year compared to 288 (84.2%) for the control group. Although no differences in grade point average were noted for the 1990 cohort, 83% of the 1991 cohort completed the first year with a 2.0 or above compared to 70.7% for the control group. Future research will investigate overall satisfaction with the university experience as a function of participation in the first year experience program.

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Oregon State University

Oregon State University
Corvallis, Oregon

Oregon State University is a public, four-year institution with an enrollment of approximately 15,000 students.

The Course

Oregon States offers its first-year students the option of participating in extended orientation seminars or academic seminars which address broad philosophical or contemporary issues. Extended orientation seminars are one-credit hour courses taught by upper-level students who receive academic credit for teaching the courses. University seminars also carry one hour of academic credit but are taught exclusively by faculty.

Course Outcomes

In order to measure the differential effect of these courses and of the traditional week-long, pre-semester orientation upon participating students, 88 students who had selected one of the three options were matched on the basis of gender, academic major, high school GPA, and living in a specific residence hall. In all, a total of 264 freshmen, representing 12% of the entering freshman class, were involved in the study. At the conclusion of the fall term, the three groups were asked to complete the Student Reactions to College (SRC), a 150-item survey produced by the College and University Programs Division of the Educational Testing Service. Each item of the survey requires students to assess some aspect of the college experience and to indicate the degree to which this event typified their experience. Groups showed a high degree of consistency in their reactions to the SRC sub-categories; however, some 34 significant differences were found between group comparisons on the 114 items of the SRC.

An intriguing finding of this study is that there were five common student reactions in the two radically different freshman seminar courses. These reactions distinguished seminar participants from students who had participated only in the pre-semester, week-long orientation. These

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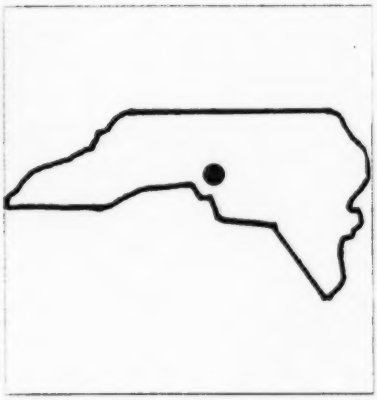
Oregon State University . . .

common reactions were as follows: seminar participants believed that they were treated as adults, that collegiate rules were made with student consultation, and that information about the college was easy to get, that the institution was a helpful place, and that they were becoming academically integrated into the institution.

A comparison of participant reactions in the two different types of freshman seminars indicated that participants in the academic seminar were more likely to have informal interactions with faculty about issues not related to class and more likely to receive help from faculty with course-related problems. However, these same students expressed a greater level of dissatisfaction with the general quality of freshman instruction at this institution.

University of North Carolina at Charlotte



University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Charlotte, North Carolina

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte is a public, four-year institution with a student population of just over 15,000.

The Course

The freshman seminar currently offered at the UNC-Charlotte is designed to integrate students into the academic and social environment of the university. This course carries three credit hours of elective credit and emphasizes academic survival skills, orientation to the campus and its services, and the development of a close relationship with a faculty member. Section size is limited to 20 students

Course Outcomes

In 1987, researchers at UNC-Charlotte investigated the social and academic integration of freshman seminar participants and non-participants. Because of the increased academic support and faculty and peer interactions provided by the freshman seminar, it was hypothesized that students who had taken the course would show higher levels of institutional commitment, as measured by academic and social integration, than students who had not enrolled in the freshman seminar. Using the Adjective Rating Scale, freshman seminar participants and non-participants rated their academic and their social environments. In addition, data were collected on student grade point averages, expectations of college life, numbers of informal interactions with faculty members, and extracurricular involvement.

Study findings indicated that freshman seminar participants had significantly higher grade point averages and more informal social interactions with faculty than non-participants. Significant differences between seminar and non-seminar students were not indicated from analyses involving the Adjective Rating Scale.

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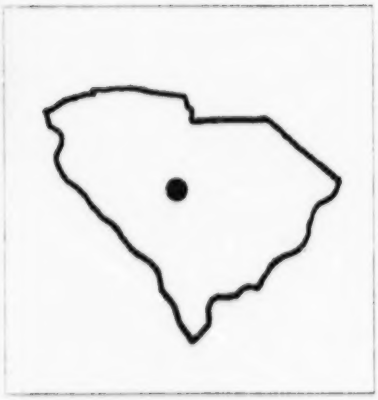
University of South Carolina



University of South Carolina
Columbia, South Carolina

The University of South Carolina is the flagship university for the state. It is a research university that enrolls approximately 26,000 students.

The Course

University 101, a course which combines both extended orientation and interdisciplinary academic content, has been offered by the University since 1972. It is a three-semester hour, graded course which carries elective credit. University 101 is taught by both faculty and student affairs administrators, all of whom must participate in a week-long instructor training workshop as a prerequisite to teaching. University 101 is an elective course for all students except those who are admitted provisionally. Provisional year students take special sections of University 101 as part of their required curriculum. In the fall of 1992, approximately 70% of the entering freshman class enrolled in one of 70 sections of the course. Maximum course size is 25 students. Special University 101 sections have been designed for students in the Colleges of Science and Math, Education, and Journalism. These sections are taught by faculty in these disciplines and combine an introduction to the discipline with other elements of course content such as career exploration, the purpose of higher education, diversity, and health issues.

During the past four years, University 101 has become a primary forum for the delivery of information from the University Health Center about sexual behavior and sexually transmitted diseases. Through large group presentations by Health Center staff followed by small group discussion, first-year students have the opportunity to explore responsible sexual behavior and decision-making.

Course Outcomes

Since its inception, University 101 has been evaluated with respect to its effect on participant retention, graduation, predicted versus earned GPAs, and a number of other outcomes. In 13 of the 19 years of research on this course,

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University of South Carolina . . .

University 101 participants achieved significantly higher sophomore return rates. In the remaining six years, participants also returned in somewhat higher percentages than did nonparticipants although the differences were not statistically significant. Participants have also utilized campus resources and have become more involved in the overall life of the campus than non-participants.

A seven year longitudinal study was also performed to determine the relationship of University 101 participation to ultimate graduation. This study found that from Fall 1979 to Spring 1986, University 101 participants graduated at higher rates than did non-participants.

Recently, health educators have researched the impact of the unit on responsible sexual behaviors and sexually transmitted diseases on the self-reported sexual behavior of University 101 students. Male students who participated in University 101 reported a 16% greater rate of abstinence following the presentations. Female University 101 students reported an increased use of condoms following the presentation but no decrease in sexual activity. A control group of non-participants showed no change in behavior over the subject semester.

Western Michigan University

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Western Michigan University is a state institution of approximately 28,000 students.

The Course

Western Michigan's freshman course, UNV 101, was initiated in the fall semester of 1988 as a one-credit course to help freshmen make the transition from high school to college and to provide them with opportunities to develop academic and social skills which will help them succeed in the university. From the program's inception, all instructors of UNV 101 have volunteered to teach without compensation, helping students become familiar with university resources and honing their academic skills. UNV 101 is required for specially admitted students, but is optional for regular admits.

In order to acquaint new students with the multitude of on-campus services, instructors visited service sites such as the health center and the career counseling center with their students. Other university resource centers gave presentations on their services to freshmen in the UNV 101 course. Note-taking, test-taking, study skills, and time management were all topics of improvement for freshmen who took the course. By working in small groups with professors, students learn about social opportunities and responsibilities on campus.

Course Outcomes

Of the 693 freshmen who enrolled in UNV 101 for the fall of 1991, 79.9% were retained into the spring semester. Of the 1,979 freshmen who did not attend UNV 101, 79.1% were retained. Differences between the two groups in hours attained during the freshman year were also small; 28.7 hours for those who did not take the course and 27.8 hours attained for UNV 101 students. The average accumulated GPA for UNV 101 students was 2.79, while the average for non-UNV 101 students was 2.82. Researchers also report that the class routinely registers highly favorable evaluations from students.

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